

South Ayrshire Council

**Report by Assistant Director - Place
to Leadership Panel
of 9 February 2021**

Subject: Improving Biodiversity in South Ayrshire

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek panel approval to improve biodiversity in South Ayrshire by undertaking a pilot project to develop wildflower meadows.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Panel approves the development of pilot wildflower meadows within South Ayrshire at the locations shown in [Appendix 1](#).**

3. Background

- 3.1 Across the country there has been increasing interest in the development of wildflower meadows to improve local biodiversity and creating a more diverse habitat. Interest has increased during the Covid-19 pandemic as during periods of lockdown normal maintenance as not been possible and the amount of diverse plant material that was able to flourish has been clearly visible.
- 3.2 There have been many studies undertaken on the benefits of biodiverse, wildflower areas, such as [Wildflower meadow habitats - Forest Research](#), and a number of local authorities have begun to explore what is possible in their local area.
- 3.3 There are two main types of wildflower meadow, annual and perennial, with each requiring specific forms of ground preparation and ongoing maintenance. [Appendix 2](#) provides a detailed assessment of each form of meadow. There is also a biodiversity benefit from altering, where possible, the grass cutting regime to allow longer grassland to develop without the inclusion of wildflower. This is also detailed in [Appendix 2](#).
- 3.4 Not all grass areas lend themselves to being developed as a wildflower meadow or to an altered maintenance regime. To ensure a successful meadow a specific maintenance treatment is required and this includes cutting and lifting of the long grass. To do so, all sites require to be of sufficient size to allow tractor access as well as having good drainage.

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4. Proposals

4.1 It is proposed that Grounds Maintenance develop the selected pilot areas as meadows as shown in the table below and in more detail in [Appendix 1](#). The pilot areas will be either be formed as a Perennial Meadow, an Annual Meadow or have altered maintenance with a feature cut.

1.	Open space adjacent to no 21 Castle Walk and 34 Greenan Road, Ayr
2.	Area between 35 and 49 Glenalla Crescent, Ayr
3.	Area North-west of Millennium Bridge, Ayr
4.	Area at Hayhill, Ayr
5.	Area at Castlehill Estate, Ayr
6.	Area at Glenmuir Place, Ayr
7.	Area at Kingsmeadow Estate, Semple Road, Prestwick
8.	Area next to Ardfin Road Play Area, Prestwick

4.2 The pilot sites are in a variety of areas including parks, general public space and housing areas. This will allow us to determine the public appetite for these proposals in different types of locations. The service will work with the Communication team to create a clear communication package around the proposals to ensure the public understand the motivation for pilots. A consultation and evaluation process will also be undertaken with local communities where the pilots will be established.

4.3 The proposed sites are all within the Ayr and Prestwick area to reduce travel time of the machinery necessary to cut grass and for the cuttings to be transported to our Green Waste Recycling site at Glenburn Prestwick. This is important to ensure the pilots are undertaken as efficiently as possible from an operational perspective and to streamline the evaluation process.

4.4 Throughout the trial period the pilot sites will be monitored and assessed. This assessment will be undertaken by the Parks Rangers to evaluate the biodiversity benefit of the 3 different formats. Survey work will include use of quadrats and insect traps which will allow us to assess which meadow is of greatest biodiversity benefit. The financial implications of each pilot area will also be monitored and reported as part of the evaluation.

4.5 If the Covid-19 restrictions allow, the Park Rangers will utilise these sites as outdoor classrooms and to provide educational classes on a range of subjects e.g. bugs n beasties, how to survey a site, plant identification.

4.6 During this time we will also assess all of the land that we maintain and identify sites that lend themselves to be developed as wildflower meadows or altered grass maintenance. The pilot programme would run as follows;

- Prepare sites February and March
- Sow sites March and April
- Cut and lift meadow during August and September

4.7 Given the limited number of sites being proposed, Neighbourhood Services will be able to absorb any staffing costs within the current budget. A contractor has also agreed to supply demonstration equipment for a period of time that will allow us to undertake the pilot at minimum cost. Full costs will be established as part of the evaluation process.

5. Legal and Procurement Implications

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

5.2 There are no procurement implications arising from this report.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 The limited number of sites will allow Neighbourhood Services to incorporate costs within the current budget whilst a supplier is providing the necessary machinery on a demonstration basis.

6.2 Full evaluation of the pilot will include staffing, equipment and material costs and this will be used to establish an overall cost should the Council choose to adopt a wildflower approach to biodiversity.

7. Human Resources Implications

7.1 There are no human resource implications related to the content of this paper at this time.

8. Risk

8.1 *Risk Implications of Adopting the Recommendations*

8.1.1 There is a risk that the Council receives negative feedback and complaints regarding perceived lack of maintenance.

8.2 *Risk Implications of Rejecting the Recommendations*

8.2.1 There is a risk that in rejecting this proposal the Council will reduce the opportunity to meet our legally required Biodiversity duty.

9. Equalities

9.1 The proposals in this report have been assessed through the Equality Impact Assessment Scoping Process. There are no significant positive or negative equality impacts of agreeing the recommendations and therefore an Equalities Impact Assessment is not required. A copy of the Equalities Scoping Assessment is shown in [Appendix 3](#).

10. Sustainable Development Implications

10.1 ***Considering Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)*** It was determined that an SEA will not be pursued at this time due to the current status of the actions contained.

11. Options Appraisal

11.1 An options appraisal has not been carried out in relation to the subject matter of this report.

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12. Link to Council Plan

- 12.1 The matters referred to in this report contribute to Commitment 6 of the Council Plan: A Better Place to Live/ Enhanced environment through social, cultural and economic activities.

13. Results of Consultation

- 13.1 Consultation has taken place with Councillor Ian Cochrane, Portfolio Holder for Environment, and the contents of this report reflect any feedback provided.

14. Next Steps for Decision Tracking Purposes

- 14.1 If the recommendations above are approved by Members, the Assistant Director - Place will ensure that all necessary steps are taken to ensure full implementation of the decision within the following timescales, with the completion status reported to the Leadership Panel in the 'Council and Leadership Panel Decision Log' at each of its meetings until such time as the decision is fully implemented:

<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Due date</i>	<i>Managed by</i>
Report evaluation of pilot to Leadership Panel	23 November 2021	Service Lead – Neighbourhood Services

Background Papers **None**

Person to Contact **Kenneth Dalrymple, Service Lead – Neighbourhood Services**
Walker Road, Ayr, KA8 9LE
Phone 01292 612041
E-mail Kenneth.Dalrymple@south-ayrshire.gov.uk

Date: **21 January 2021**

Perennial Meadow

Open space adjacent to no 21 Castle Walk and 34 Greenan Road, Ayr



Area between 35 and 49 Glenalla Crescent, Ayr



Area at The Oval, Prestwick



Altered maintenance with feature cuts

North-west of Millennium Bridge, Ayr



Hayhill, Ayr



Next to Ardfin Road Play Area, Prestwick

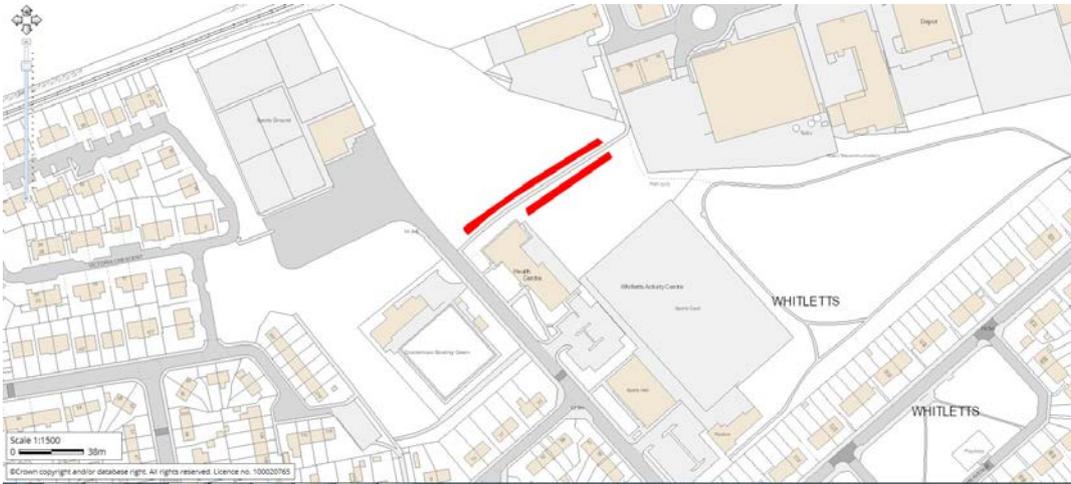


Annual Meadow

Castlehill Estate, Ayr



Glenmuir Place, Ayr



Altered maintenance with feature cuts and Annual Meadow

Kingsmeadow Estate, Semple Road, Prestwick



Type of grass area	Maintenance Required	Considerations	Comments
Annual Meadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sown in the autumn or spring • The site would then be cut in August / September and all the arisings removed. • Scarify and seed ready for the following season. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires to be sown every year. • Site requires to be cut and lifted. • Site requires to be scarified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds Maintenance does not currently have the machinery necessary to cut and lift grass. • If there are a number of sites to be cut and lifted which requires to be undertaken at a specific time of year, this may lead (especially the autumn cut) to the time of year when the ground is getting softer and may result in significant damage to the ground.
Perennial Meadow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut and lifted a minimum of twice a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To create site soils would need to be reduced in nutrition. • Remove top layer of soil. • Rotovate soil below. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is initial work required to prepare site. • As with above Grounds do not have a cut and lift machine. • There is a benefit of cutting and lifting at different times, less likely to run into the poorer weather and softer ground.
Reduced number of annual cuts but not sown with wildflower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut & lift minimum of once a year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be less plant diversity. • Site will simply be long grass 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cutting and lifting will leave the site clean and tidy and will work to reduce nutrition levels over the years. • If this form of regime is chosen it is recommended that a landscape feature be created – path, labyrinth etc. (see images)

1. **Annual Meadow** – An annual meadow requires a rich soil. There are a range of different mixes that can be purchased and they are most often very colourful, many contain flowers such as cornflowers, poppies and mayweed



This form of meadow is can be sown in the autumn or spring maturing in the summer. The site would then be cut in September / October and all the arisings removed. However, if you wish a similar display the following year the site will require to be scarified and seed sown ready for the following season.

2. **Perennial Meadow** – These meadows prefer a poorer soil to allow the wildflowers to be able to compete with the grasses. If you wish to create such a meadow where you have a richer soil (as we have in the majority of land within South Ayrshire) then it is recommended that the top layer of soil is removed and that seed is sown into rotovated subsoil. Perennial meadows are less showy than their annual cousins.





As with an annual meadow a maintenance regime is required. To assist a new meadow to develop it is recommended that after 6-8 weeks of growth that the meadow is mown and that you continue to mow every 8 weeks during the growing season to ensure the seed has established a good root system. Once you have established your meadow it will require to be cut a minimum of twice a year. The Royal Horticultural Society clearly describes why the cuts are important and what the benefit of each is: -

These can be cut at a number of times in the year, depending on the vigour of the meadow and which types of flowers wish to be encouraged. The key cuts of the season fall roughly into three times of year and a perennial meadow can be managed effectively with one or more of these cuts;

- 1. Spring cut - this is useful for meadows where grass growth is very lush. Cut back to height of 7.5cm (3in) only and complete this cut no later than the end of April. It can also be used in conjunction with sowing yellow rattle in August (see Problems section) to help manage grass-dominant meadows.*
- 2. Main summer cut - this is also referred to as the 'hay cut' and removes the bulk of the material, allowing it to either be baled or composted. This cut is done between late June and the end of August; the earlier cutting favours spring flowers such as cowslips, fritillary, lady's smock, selfheal and bugle; the later cutting favours summer flowers such as knapweed, devil's bit scabious and lady's bedstraw.*
- 3. Autumn cut - particularly useful for fertile sites, one or two cuts between the end of August and late November removes surplus growth and helps keep grasses at bay to allow the wildflowers to persist.*

Following the last cut of the season, all meadows can be kept mown to keep the grass short and neat through the winter is desired. Any cut that produces substantial clippings should have the clippings removed and composted.

www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=446

4. Altered Maintenance: Long Grass – Below are images of uncut grassland



Whenever there is longer grass there are some anti- social issues – litter, fly tipping, potential for hidden needles. As such, even when grass is long there is some level of maintenance required.

To make sites more attractive and aesthetically pleasing, especially when there is little flower, may well be beneficial. Putting paths through areas, cutting areas so that they form a sort of labyrinth or cut in a way that it makes a feature.



1. Policy details

Policy Title: Development of Wildflower Meadows in South Ayrshire	Lead Officer Kenneth Dalrymple
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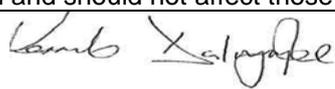
2. Which communities, groups of people, employees or thematic groups do you think will be, or potentially could be, impacted upon by the implementation of this policy? Please indicate whether these would be positive or negative impacts

Community, Groups of People or Themes	Negative Impacts	Positive impacts
The whole community of South Ayrshire	N/A	N/A
People from different racial groups, ethnic or national origin.	N/A	N/A
Women and/or men (boys and girls)	N/A	N/A
People with disabilities	N/A	N/A
People from particular age groups for example Older people, children and young people	N/A	N/A
Lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual people	N/A	N/A
People who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone a process to change sex	N/A	N/A
Pregnant women and new mothers	N/A	N/A
People who are married or in a civil partnership	N/A	N/A
People who share a particular religion or belief	N/A	N/A
Thematic Groups: Health, Human Rights, Rurality and Deprivation.	N/A	N/A

3. Do you have evidence or reason to believe that the policy will support the Council to:

General Duty and other Equality Themes	Level of Negative and/or Positive Impact (high, medium or low)
Eliminate discrimination and harassment faced by particular communities or groups	N/A
Promote equality of opportunity between particular communities or groups	N/A
Foster good relations between particular communities or groups	N/A
Promote positive attitudes towards different communities or groups	N/A
Increase participation of particular communities or groups in public life	N/A
Improve the health and wellbeing of particular communities or groups	N/A
Promote the human rights of particular communities or groups	N/A
Tackle deprivation faced by particular communities or groups	N/A

4. Summary Assessment

Is a full Equality Impact Assessment required? (A full EIA must be carried out on all high and medium impact policies)		YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rationale for decision: There are no equality issues relating to the electrification of small fleet vehicles by 2025 and the phased removal of grey fleet mileage. This process will be determined by the requirements of service provision and should not affect those with protected characteristics.			
Signed : 		Service Lead, Neighbourhood Services	
Date: 14 January 2021		Copy to equalities@south-ayrshire.gov.uk	